

# Bracelets benefit local victims

□ The rubber bracelets are \$2 each and can be purchased at local high schools.

By **KIMBERLY SOLET**

Senior Staff Writer

HOUMA — Touched by the losses facing thousands of Terrebonne families and children, teenagers at Ellender and South Terrebonne high schools launched a project Wednesday to raise money for hurricane relief.

The students will sell 3,000 rubber bracelets engraved with the words "Hurricane Relief," "Rainbow of Hope" and "Katrina" at \$2 a pop.

Proceeds were originally intended for victims of Katrina in the New Orleans area. But the devastation Hurricane Rita has wreaked on an estimated one-fourth of the Terrebonne Parish population has students committed to donating the money to local relief efforts. One idea is to use the money to purchase new uniforms for children who lost all their clothing in the storm.

For three Ellender students who helped spearhead the project along with marketing teacher Ellis Bonaventure and their South Terrebonne counterparts, the blue and rainbow-colored bracelets have special meaning.

Kristen Parfait, 16, an Ellender junior from Dulac, lost her home to floodwaters that climbed 3 feet inside her bedroom. Most of her belongings are gone, along with the family's pictures and furniture. But Kristen knows she isn't alone, as nearly every student in her hometown has suffered in some way from flooding. Instead of dwelling on her own misfortune, the cheerful young woman said she is committed to helping other students in need.

"We do have a lot to sell, but we're going to sell each and every one," she said.

Classmates Sarah Jenkins, 16, and

Joshua Naquin, 17, both of Houma, also vowed to contribute all they could. Before the morning ended, the group had already sold \$300 worth of bracelets to two local businesses, and they spent the afternoon raking in more money for relief.

The hurricanes have transformed these teenagers into activists and advocates.

Sarah, a junior, said she penned two letters to lawmakers Tuesday during her World History class requesting that the federal government allow Terrebonne to use its

own money to rebuild damaged levees. Joshua, a senior, said he nearly cried when he discussed south Louisiana's suffering during Honors English 4.

"I just get so emotional talking about it because this is where I live, and it kills me that

this is happening to our people," said Joshua.

"We just want to be heard," added Sarah.

Bracelets will be distributed to every parish school for purchase by next week, said Bonaventure. A number of local businesses also have promised to purchase them in bulk and make them available in their lobbies. Students also plan to sell the colorful bracelets at tonight's Time For Action rally at the Houma-Terrebonne Civic Center.

Bonaventure noted the bracelet-selling project is a collaboration of several schools, including Ellender, South Terrebonne, Post Falls High School in Idaho and BBS am Pottgraben, a high school in Osnabrück, Germany.

"I would venture to say we're the only school in the U.S. that is partnering with a European school to raise money for hurricane victims," said Bonaventure. "Fund-raising is not common in Germany, so to have students over there helping us out is really touching."

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From left, Sarah Jenkins, 16, Kristen Parfait, 16, and Joshua Naquin, 17, students at Ellender High School, pose with bracelets they are selling to raise money for hurricane relief. Although the bracelets say "Katrina," the proceeds from the sales benefit local storm victims.

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Local high schools sell bracelets to benefit storm victims. 6A